"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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WE NEED A RURAL PHILOSOPHY

By Ralph L. Williamson*

The formulation and expression of an adequate philosophy of rural life is one of the most important and basic needs of our times, yet it has received little attention from the thinkers and writers of our age. The pioneer work is yet to be done. It is a task calling for the contributions of many people out of their living experience as well as rationalized thought.

We need to make frequent philosophical examinations of the social and moral assumptions upon which are based our secular and religious programs for the improvement of rural life. Particularly is this needed as we move toward the new post-war period of rapid social change. Such philosophical analyses of rural life as have been made in recent years have been mainly confined to a few discussions, study courses, and articles. We have had brief consideration given to the subject in some of the short course schools of philosophy for extension workers which have been sponsored in recent years in some thirty states by the United States Department of Agriculture and the agricultural colleges. Courses for undergraduates are given at the University of Florida under President Tigert and the University of Vermont by Professor Dykhuizer. The Holy Earth by Liberty Hyde Bailey, published in 1915, certain bulletins of the Christian Rural Fellowship and an article by Professor Hocking in the 1940 United States Department of Agriculture Yearbook comprise almost the total available satisfactory literature in this country. It is too meagre and too incomplete. Being dissatisfied, I have been encouraging my rural colleagues in New York State to set themselves at remedying the deficiency. I am here outlining some of the problems to be faced in the development of a rural philosophy and some of the elements in my own philosophy. This is done in the hope it may stimulate your creative contributions and give added meaning to your ministry among rural people.

Jesus had a philosophy of rural life. He was the Christ of the countryside. True He was, and is, the universal Christ, the Savior of all mankind, yet in a peculiar sense He belongs to us. This becomes more clear when we contrast Him with St. Paul. Somehow in those mysterious ways of God which are past finding out, while the first great exponent of our Christian faith was a city man, its Founder was a rural Person. Where St. Paul's figures of speech were of the city's streets and games, Jesus' illustrations were drawn almost entirely from the life of village and countryside. He was most at home there. He loved the fields and flocks, mountaintops and valleys, the star-studded skies and the blue Galilee, wayside flowers and birds on mounting wing, and the ripening wheat bending golden before the passing breeze. And He understood and loved the people of the country villages.

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We are thinking of philosophy as those principles which come out of the practical everyday affairs of life and successfully meet daily needs. It means the principles by which we live and includes values, appreciations, ideals, attitudes, and insights. These cannot be scientifically measured for they do not yield to such yardsticks as the social sciences have yet developed.

Particularly does philosophy take values into account. Pure science does not consider values although applied science does for the latter asks such questions as: "What is this truth good for? How may it be used?" Applied science, which is the field that farmers are working in, as well as you and I to some extent, is a mixture of pure science and philosophy. But the emphasis today is on science and we have tended too much to overlook the basic philosophical principles back of our life and work. Yet we live by those principles for all of us have some sort of philosophy, some basic assumptions by which we live and work. We may not have thought them through very carefully. We may not often pay them conscious attention. But we have them, and most of us have some sort of philosophy of rural life. It is the high task of the church to help people formulate adequate principles for rural living.

The Situation with Respect to Developing a Rural Philosophy

An adequate philosophy is needed by all rural people--the farmer and non-farmer, the preachers, teachers, storekeepers, country doctors, editors, farm organization leaders, and extension agents. Particularly is there a need for the church forces to reach editors and farm organization leaders with a Christian view of agriculture and a realization of the wider horizons of rural life. Non-farm people, both in villages and along country roads, need and can have essentially the same view of life as the farmer. Their interests are closely bound up with his. They, too, live close to the soil and growing things.

We need a more adequate philosophy in order to keep people contented with rural life. Some thirty years ago Sir Horace Plunkett, that eminent Irish statesman who, according to Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey, was responsible for first giving Theodore Roosevelt the idea of appointing the Country Life Commission, said: "The disease which has attacked our great populations here and in America is a discontent with rural life." This discontent still exists and perhaps was at no time so prevalent as during the present war period. It is partly due to the farmer's disadvantaged economic situation. But the monetary satisfactions of themselves are never going to be adequate enough to keep people in rural life.

We need a rural philosophy in order to maintain our civilization--and to improve it. We have recently come to an awareness of the soil as being our most basic resource. Nevertheless, there is more to the maintenance of a civilization than right land use. Its fate depends upon the tiller of the soil. A nation must be healthy in spirit if it is to survive. In the simple ways of life which are still relatively possible on the farm, there are values which are lost in the activity of city life. The spirit of rural people is a basic resource of the nation.

The rural person needs a philosophy of life by which to live his daily round. It must be a Christian philosophy in the finest and most complete sense of the term. It must be relevant both to human needs and to Divine laws. As professional workers in rural life, we have a special need for a rural philosophy. We need a rural philosophy as the basis for our programs on rural improvement, for "The program of any social institution depends on (a) its basic philosophy, (b) the extent of its resources, and (c) the quality of its leadership." (Shirley Greene)

We need it in order to get better farmers and better leaders. The finer

philosophy a man has the better farmer or other rural person he will be--and better farm leader and church and community leader. His philosophy is directly related to leadership development. When Floyd Dorn, young dairy farmer in the Tobey Larger parish, learned and sang "The Blind Plowman" for the Rural Life Sunday service in 1938, it marked a step forward in his philosophy of rural life and in his leadership development for service in church and county agricultural affairs. The preaching and ministry of a friend have given another young man that genuine appreciation of country life which within the past year has led him to make a happy adjustment from working in a city milk plant to employment on a farm while at the same time finding in rural religious dramatics and in religious education an outlet for leadership qualities which had never previously been developed.

Problems

There are problems involved in achieving and stating a rural philosophy. It is true that "To a great extent we do not come at it directly but only incidentally." Further difficulty results because we lack practice in stating our personal philosophies. It has been said that, "The most dangerous feature of contemporary life is not its transition but the fact that in the course of change our capacity for serious thought has so far diminished. The underlying sadness and hollowness of much modern life is due not to poverty nor to too great labor but to an absence of depth, a fear lest meditation should show the emptiness of the affair we call life." (Hocking)

The increasing mechanization of rural life also makes for difficulty. Not that anyone would suggest the desirability of the farmer using less machinery, but it seems a fair deduction to say that the farther the farmer gets away from the use of hand skills the more difficult it is for him to do meditative thinking. Undoubtedly he does some such thinking as he rides his tractor plow, but my own experience indicates that his mind does not range as widely and freely as when he drives four big Percherons to a two bottom sulky plow. Nor when handling and stripping behind a three unit milker is he as likely to plan the next day's work or cogitate upon problems of the universe or community as when he hand-milked eight or ten cows night and morning. We have removed some of the most back-breaking physical drudgery, but we may have contributed to mental stagnation.

The increased secularization of rural life also makes a rural philosophy more difficult. Time was when there was more art and less science in agriculture, more mystery and less understanding. The farmer felt more dependent upon the mysterious forces of the universe. This was conducive to more speculative thinking.

Another difficulty is the increasing urbanization of rural life. This is nothing new, nor is it entirely undesirable. In all ages there has been a tendency to import the spirit of the city into the country. "For city life, always based more completely than that of the country on a money economy, has been able to experiment with new elements of comfort which can slowly enter into the national standard of living everywhere; and the clash of talents in the centers brings about a vivid cultural life and inventiveness whose products the country is prone to desire. Such urbanization has often brought decay in the fiber of a people. Philosophers of history have often seen in the process a phase of an inevitable rhythm leading to decline in the birthrate and the inner decay of a civilization. For the country breeds a type of man in whom natural virtues are ingrained; whereas the man of the town, living at a distance from raw materials and relying on trade and wit, tends to assume that life is satisfactory in proportion to the success of the artifices by which pain and effort are avoided. These two types (it is believed) cannot be rolled into one. Human nature requires a moral division of labor, and the city type, however much it resembles a flower, is in reality a parasite and could not survive were not the foundation there to sustain it. No civilization survives when the urbanite becomes the model for all groups.

"If this is the case, we are indeed in danger. For in no age of the world has the urbanization of farm life proceeded so fast and so far as in the United States in the last half century. This is due largely to the fact that among the most conspicuous changes are those in the instruments of attack whereby any part of the national life can be invaded by any other part. The telephone, the radio, and the automobile have put an end to loneliness; but they have also done much to put an end to privacy. The farm (which has had a surplus of loneliness, especially in the long northern winters) has not merely admitted, it has eagerly embraced these instruments of invasion. Whatever the conception of music, of news values, of entertainment, of sport may be at the broadcasting center, those conceptions thrust themselves on the listener, who feels that in listening he is sharing in the actualities of the life of his time. If being invaded is being corrupted, the country has revelled in being corrupted! We are far from asserting that this is the case; all that we here assert is that, by its own complicity, the country is actively mixing cityhood into itself at a rate never before realized in history." (Hocking)

The prevalent emphasis of our times upon material standards of success, the dollar standards, certainly interferes with the development of an emphasis upon those values, attitudes, ideals, and appreciations which are a part of any working philosophy. I look upon commercialized farming by the family-sized farm as desirable, but deplore the extent to which the operators of family farms have let their point of view and practices become materialistic. Many of them have failed to see agriculture as a way of life--not a way of making a living.

There are, however, some hopeful factors in the situation. Not all are unfavorable. Many observers have been saying recently that we are on the threshold of great cultural developments in our civilization, that will parallel the advances that the physical sciences have made in the last century. It is indeed high time there was more culture in agriculture.

Another favorable factor is that, after all, every individual has some sort of personal philosophy by which he lives even though it may not be formulated or expressed. Dr. Mark Rich tells how he once found an old farmer who had spent a lifetime at hardscrabble farming on a rocky hillside farm in southern New York. The farmer told Mr. Rich with considerable satisfaction how his son had enthusiastically told him one day that he too had decided to become a farmer. Whereupon the father, wishing to make sure the young man had no illusions about farm life, pointed out to him the many hardships, drudgery, and uncertain income and concluded by advising him not to become a farmer unless he could "capitalize upon the sunsets." This incident is but a sample of many which could be quoted.

The response of people to rural sermons has particularly impressed me as a favorable factor. It has seemed to betoken their interest in a rural philosophy and satisfaction at having put into words for them some of the things which they long had felt. Soberly we might ask ourselves: "How can this best be done by the preacher and the church? How can other agencies best express it?" A deeper consciousness of God and of moral and spiritual values does seem to be breaking through in new places today--at least in rural life.

What to Include in Our Philosophy of Rural Life

1. Emphasis on the individual

I place an emphasis upon the values of the individual personality. Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey has enriched my understanding when he says in The Holy Earth: "We are to accomplish certain social results otherwise than by the process of thronging, which is so much a part of the philosophy of this anxious epoch.....Any close and worthwhile contact with the earth tends to make one original or at least detached

in one's judgments and independent of group control. In proportion as society becomes organized and involved, do we need the separate spirit and persons who are responsible beings on their own account. There is one method of aggregation and social intercourse. There is another method of isolation and separateness. Never in the open country do I see a young man or woman at nightfall going down the highways and the long fields but I think of the character that develops out of the loneliness, in the silence of vast surroundings, projected against the backgrounds, and of the suggestions that must come from these situations as contrasted with those that arise from the babble of the crowds. There is hardiness in such training; there is independence, the taking of one's own risk and no need of the protection of compensation acts. There is no over-imposed director to fall back on."

Speaking of the individual as lost in the mass in industry, Dr. Bailey says, "In some way we must protect the person from being submerged in the system. We always must get back of the group to the individual. The person is the reason for the group, although he is responsible to the group."..... "Never have we needed the separate soul so much as now."

2. The care of growing things

Personally, I am much impressed by what the care of growing things does for the individual, young or old. It is primarily for this reason that we have our home outside of a village on a little place where there is space for our three boys to have animals and plants for which they must faithfully care. The care of growing things almost always needs to be individualized else those organisms, be they animal or plant, will not develop and produce properly. And the higher the point to which they are bred, the greater seems to be their need of individualized attention. "The eye of the master fatteneth his cattle" runs an old adage.

3. Creativity

The care of growing plants and animals gives a peculiar satisfaction to the farmer which the city man does not get from his work. It permits him to creatively put his ideas into effect. Whereas the city man may have endless ideas for changing his physical surroundings, he is not free to use his muscles on them, not even to smash the furniture. The industrial laborer is using his muscles but is not free to carry out his own plans. But the farmer is free in both ways. His work makes it necessary for him to plan and then to work at his plans with all the power and ingenuity that is in him. "Creating in this sense is his business. And also in another sense. He effects the first transformation of the useless into the useful." (Hocking) He is the primary producer and most fundamental creator among men. This sense of creativeness is an important part of our rural philosophy, particularly the realization of being a co-worker with God in that creation.

4. Ownership of property

I am also impressed by what the ownership of property does for the individual. It is not enough that my boys should have animals and crops to care for. They need also to own them. We have found by experience that when each boy owns a Collie female better care is given and better character development takes place than when there is collective ownership of the same number of dogs. There is a necessary place for collective or cooperative ownership and the farmer must have far more of it. There is a true place, however, for individual ownership and it has a powerful influence on character development. There is no ownership of property quite so powerful in its influence upon men as the ownership of farm land. "Whatever a man completely owns, whether it be a whole farm or but a single tool or animal, it is that bit of property which most completely reflects the kind of man he is. -- He enjoys the privileges of rulership and learns by experience what kind of ruler he would

make! This is an invaluable experience for a democracy. -- Everyman's bit of private property, be it large or small, is his special field for gaining experience in the use of authority. It is apprenticeship in authority. It is for this reason that the farm, as an actual domain, has been so significant a training ground for our democracy." (Hocking)

5. Group experience

My rural philosophy contains an emphasis upon the values of life experiences in small groups. Association in small groups such as are best fostered in community life, and especially within rural communities, is highly important. I think we are coming to see more clearly its importance for the individual on one hand and for society on the other. We are beginning to recognize it as an essential for any true democracy. Our church programs should make a large place for experiences in small groups.

6. Reverence for the earth

Reverence for the soil is another element in our rural philosophy. The soil is the basis for all our physical life upon this planet. We have not held it in reverence. We have called it dirt and despised it. We have seen it as something inert, and not living; static, not dynamic. As a matter of fact every cubic inch of soil is filled with millions of living organisms which if they stopped their action for a short time would soon result in our death by starvation. No, we have not properly regarded the soil. We have mined it, eroded it, and abandoned it. We have not prepared to pass it on to succeeding generations enriched and able to sustain life more abundantly than when we assumed jurisdiction over it.

We must come to hold the earth as sacred and feel a deep sense of stewardship for it. "If God created the earth, so is the earth hallowed; and if it is hallowed, so must we deal with it devotedly and with care that we do not despoil it, and mindful of our relations to all beings that live on it. We are to consider it religiously. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Dr. Bailey in The Holy Earth)

7. Appreciation of beauty

It is essential that our rural philosophy be one which appreciates the beauty of form and color of animals, fruits, vegetables, trees, flowers and crops, and the sunsets. If not, it will miss some of the most important values and simple joys of country life--joys and values which usually cost not one cent and upon which no pricemark can be put. If we miss them we will not be the well balanced, stable and joyous persons we have every right to be.

8. The family

Our rural philosophy must recognize the family as basic. This is important not alone for rural life but for the welfare of the nation. "The rural home and family stand today, therefore, before church and nation as the American type. The city family, much as we may deplore the fact, has long since ceased to be the type family. The farm home is holding the family idea in the nation, almost at the last ditch, it must be conceded. This is the first basic reason why rural life has national social significance, why the farmer has a role of honor in American Christendom." (Galpin). This is not to say that farm family life is ideal nor that all is well with it. There is still hope, however, as well as room for improvement.

The farm family lives as a unit on the land. The work of the father is

under the eyes of the family. Furthermore, its members participate in its processes, both individually and as a group. "The family is a unit in producing and consuming not only economic goods, but cultural values as well; a unit in the development of school, church, and community life." (Lindstrom) "The land is the foundation of the family and the family is the foundation of the State." (Baker) The family farm should be more frequently transmitted intact to successive generations. "For the farmer, his family is the chief enlarger of his life; and if he can find satisfaction in his children it may be his chief reward. The farmer is likely to define this satisfaction in terms of handing his farm on to a son; he likes to think of his occupation as hereditary." (Hocking)

9. The process of growth

Finally, it seems important that our rural philosophy be one which takes account of and finds itself in harmony with the processes and the rhythm of the growth cycle of nature. We will then understand the importance of seed-sowing, whether of plant seeds or ideas, and then waiting patiently as we cultivate and nurse the tender organisms toward the day of harvest. Some of us may even see the importance of doing no more than preparing the soil for the reception of the seed, well content to leave the sowing, the cultivating, and the harvesting to others and to God, and resting in quiet confidence that our labor is not in vain. Inscribed over the entrance to Cornell University's agricultural economics hall are these little known lines from Whittier:

"Never yet share of truth was vainly set
In the world's wide fallow;
After hands shall sow the seed,
After hands from hill and mead
Shall reap the harvests yellow."

Elinor Atkeson, in her story of the life of Johnny Appleseed, that eccentric who spent a lifetime planting apple seeds in the Ohio country in advance of the coming of apple-hungry settlers from New England, reminds us that the horticulturist must have a special sort of patience for he must wait for his first harvest while other farmers reap ten times.

This concept of the growth process has become a guiding principle in my work. In my parish ministry it meant that I might take two or three years to introduce a new idea to my people and to work it out in our program.

The growth process is but one side of a cycle which includes destruction by decay. It is a sacred process. In the very instant that Nature, God if you will, breaks down a plant or animal cell into its elements those parts are immediately locked up in some new form. That new form eventually, and often immediately, is in the form of a new organism. Life is within it. Growth has taken place somehow through the mysterious economy of God. I say there is a whole realm of exploration here for those who would, not build, but grow a rural philosophy.

Scripturally the growth process is expressed many times in the words of Jesus and thereby is revealed the depth of His understanding of rural processes. I find here the evidence that He had a rural philosophy. He spoke of the growth process when He spoke of the leaven in the meal, the growth of the mustard seed, the parable of the soils, the parable of the tares, and perhaps most completely and tersely when He said: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear" was the way in which the Kingdom should come. Nor should we overlook one of the fundamental requisites for us if we are to assist this growth process of the Kingdom. "I am the vine, ye are the branches," the Master said. It is necessary for us to endeavor to keep as close a relationship with him as the branch has to the grape vine, if we are

to understand and perform His will and so do our part in bringing the Kingdom into rural life and life everywhere.

These, then, are some of the elements in a satisfactory philosophy of rural life: (1) An emphasis on the value of the individual personality; (2) the influence which the care of growing things has on character; (3) the farmer as a creator; (4) effect of ownership of property; (5) value of small group experience; (6) reverence for the earth; (7) appreciation of beauty; (8) importance of the family; (9) the growth process. An adequate rural philosophy must take into account man's relationship to his family, neighbors, society, land, animals, crops, and his God. It must be a Christian philosophy. It must be world-ranging in its applications. It must form the basis of the work and play of farmers and all other rural folk.

The Responsibility of the Rural Ministry for Promoting a Christian Rural Philosophy

I suppose there are none here who would deny that we as ministers and church workers have a special responsibility to develop and promote an understanding of a Christian philosophy for rural life. That responsibility is inherent in our calling to the ministry. It is doubly true of those of us who have felt called to a special ministry in the town and country churches. Our responsibility lies partly in the fact that we are set aside to a special calling, that we are afforded a livelihood by the people of our constituencies in order that we may have leisure to meditate upon the deep things of God. Often the farmer and his wife are so drained of vitality by their arduous labor that reflective thinking becomes well nigh impossible.

We may well ask ourselves, How can we discharge this responsibility? A great deal of hard thinking plus reading plus discussions with like-minded people seems the first answer. We should preach sermons along this line frequently and not only on Rural Life and Harvest Festival Sundays. Discussions before Bible classes, young peoples groups, and other organized groups within the church as well as local non-church groups such as the Grange, Home and Farm Bureau and high school assemblies are possibilities as no doubt many of you have recognized. Articles in the secular and religious press including the local newspaper should be prepared. Radio talks may occasionally be given and talks before rural life conferences both secular and religious. Bulletins may be written such as those prepared at present by the Christian Rural Fellowship, and the Rural Life Bulletin of Garrett Biblical Institute. Personally, I think one of the best opportunities is when doing pastoral work in barn and field and kitchen. While the farmer rests his horses or refills the seeder box or the housewife dries the dishes, what better time or environment for the development of what McConnell calls the philosophy of barns and kitchens. Some of the best face-to-face discussions with my parishioners took place under such circumstances. Deliberative discussions seem to halt and resume their flow more naturally when accompanied by simple muscular activity.

There is a possibility the farmer may be degraded to serfdom, that he may degenerate in morals and morale, that he may lose his independence and initiative. We must labor to prevent this. We must seek to make him a forthright citizen of the world in the new era which is before us. We must seek to make him a true citizen of the Kingdom. The time is short. It is in the nature of an emergency task. The rural ministry is in a strategic position to contribute most effectively. Except for the public school teachers, we are the most numerous of all professional workers in rural life, and we have the best opportunity to make this contribution.

(Note: All quotations from Hocking are taken from the 1940 Yearbook of Agriculture and the chapter on "Philosophy of Life for the American Farmer (and others)" by William Ernest Hocking.)

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